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ABSTRACT

Romanian is characterized by a richness of surface forms that are difficult to classify and even more difficult for the learner to assimilate. There is much instructional material available in Romanian, and in a survey of fifty works published outside the country, four categories emerged: teaching materials, pedagogical grammars, grammars, and readers. Four works in the first category were examined to determine to what degree they deal with the complexities of Romanian forms. Conversations and dialogs from the works were compared with a list of 1,607 high-frequency items compiled from several studies, and occurrences were compiled in these inflectional categories: number, gender, case, definitization, deicticization, person, mood, and tense. The results reflect the abundance of primary forms in the language and certain preferences in speech: for the singular over the plural, nominative and accusative over all others, indicative mood, present tense, third person, and feminine over masculine and neuter. In developing teaching materials, authors should present both the norms and variants, balancing the primary forms with the many surface forms. A statistical analysis of Romanian usage is necessary for improved Romanian teaching and learning. (MSE)

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"Teaching Romanian: Theory and Practice"

by Charles M. Carlton

Of the Romance languages, Romanian has long occupied a place apart for the Romance linguist, for its conservatism (e.g., a case system, a neuter plural in {uri}, a synthetic pluperfect, all direct reflexes of Latin and not generally observable in the more commonly known Romance languages, French, Spanish, and Italian, for example) and for its innovativeness (e.g., two varieties of schwa, two future formations--with variants, the phoneme /h/, etc.).*

Despite its superficial resemblance to its congeners (considerably abetted by a conscious re-Latinization, mostly via French, in the 19th century in its lexicon),[1] Romanian has been so regularly governed in its historical development by laws of phonology and so little regularized by such psychological forces as analogy as to produce a great richness of surface forms. Not only do the classification and description of these forms pose numerous and special problems for the specialist, but, I further suggest, this morphological variety offers special problems of assimilation to the learner.

Illustrations come quickly to mind, such as these nouns borrowed into Romanian, bomboană 'candy' from French, and ciorbă '(sour) soup' from Turkish, plus an etymological doublet, oară 'time' and oră 'hour', both from Latin (h)ora(m). A paradox arises: those forms which strike the non-native, confronting the system as an "outsider", as being in some way more "regular" are for the Romanian native-speaker the exceptional forms; conversely, what may strike the learner as aberrant and unpredictable

* Originally presented as a paper in the session on Problems of Teaching Romanian, annual convention of the Modern Language Association, New York City, December 28, 1983.

is for the native-speaker the rule. Had ciorbă been part of the original word-stock it would have been subject to diphthongization of the accented vowel [o] before a final [e] or schwa--via partial regressive assimilation --as recorded in hundreds and hundreds of lexical items (nostru: noastră, noastre, ajutor: ajutoare, and so on). The result would have been *cioarbă, just as in fact was the case with bomboană, bomboane, from French bonbon(s). As for the reflexes of Latin horam, oară is the older of the two, having participated in the historical development characteristic of Romanian, while oră is a later "learnèd" form.

Other illustrations of parallel change are readily found, e.g., observa 'observe', another loan from French, its 3rd person singular-plural present indicative having been transformed, Romanian-style, into non-literary obsearvă via diphthongization of accented [e] before schwa.

For the general linguist also Romanian occupies a place of special interest, not only for such rich series of alternations, both vocalic and consonantal, just alluded to, but also for the external influences which have operated on it, giving it a postposed definite article in substantives, and a predilection for the "subjunctive" vis-à-vis the infinitive, in common with much of the Balkan speech community.

Romanian further enjoys a mixed Latin and substratum word stock, plus heavy admixtures of Slavic, Greek, Hungarian, and Turkish and French, mentioned above, in addition to which the morphophonological alternations operate independently of form-classes. This produces a profusion of discrete, at times redundant, forms; at the same time, the high incidence of homophony can betoken potential ambiguity.

By way of illustration, the plural nominative-accusative of the feminine

noun carte 'book' is triply marked: in the vowel ending (*carti), in the ensuing consonantal change (*carți), and lastly in the change effected in the stressed vowel under the influence of the final vowel, cărți [kərci] . In terms of communication, the form is thus twice redundant.

This overload of markers is perhaps even more striking in constructions involving noun and demonstrative adjectives: while Romanian possesses a word-for-word equivalent această carte for 'this book', the more common construction is noun plus determiners. This word order then automatically triggers the addition of two more demonstrative particles, definite article {a}[1] 'the' agglutinated to the noun, and the deictic or pointing out particle morpheme {a}[2] agglutinated to the adjective. Cartea aceasta is nothing less than 'book-the' plus 'this-this one'.[2]

Let us return to cărți, to illustrate yet another feature characteristic of Romanian, namely its potential for ambiguity. For cărți is something more than the nominative-accusative plural, having not one but two other functions, those of the non-definitized singular or plural of the genitive-dative case. Examples are:

Am citit cele două cărți 'I read the two books'
Cele două cărți sînt noi 'The two books are new'

and Datorită |acestei cărți| am învățat mult
|acestor|
'Because of |this book| I learned a lot'
|these books|

It is in this interplay of redundancy on the one hand and potential ambiguity on the other that insights into the structure of Romanian may be gained by linguists. It goes, furthermore, without saying that an understanding and an acceptance of the polyvalent nature of Romanian forms are essential for those approaching the language from the outside.

Countless other illustrations can be given of structural features with a potential for impeding easy assimilation of the Romanian language by the foreigner, visual in the case of homographs (e.g., a ieşí 'to go out' vs. tu iéşi 'you go out', répede 'quickly' vs. repéde 'he/she throws'), visual and aural in the case of homophones (e.g., capete, as the plural of nouns cap 'head' and capăt 'end', and as the 3rd person singular-plural present subjunctive of a căpăta 'to get, obtain').

Romanian further lends itself readily to the discernment of its significant phonological contrasts via minimal pairs, of which the following sets, centering on carte 'book', and including carne 'meat', curte 'court(yard), hartă 'map', and parte 'part', are but a small sampling:

consonant initial		medial		vowel accented	
/h/:	hărţi	/c/:	cărţi	/á/:	carte
/k/:	cărţi	/n/	cărni	/ú/	curte
/p/	părţi				
/h/:	hărţii	/c/:	cărţii	/á/:	cartea
/k/:	cărţii	/n/	cărnii	/ú/	curtea
/p/	părţii				
/h/:	hărţile	/n/:	carne	/ə́/:	cărţi
/k/:	cărţile	/t/	carte	/ú/	curţi
/p/	părţile				
/h/:	hărţilor	/n/:	carnea	/ə́/:	cărţii
/k/:	cărţilor	/t/	cartea	/ú/	curţii
/p/	părţilor				
/k/:	carte			/ə́/:	cărţile
/p/	parte			/ú/	curţile
/k/:	cartea			/ə́/:	cărţilor
/p/	partea			/ú/	curţilor

The practical benefit of mapping such contrasts might well be demonstrated in exercises involving unusual or non-existent contrasts in the learner's native language, e.g., accented /u/ opposed to schwa in the case of speakers of English.

In a recent and favorably reviewed study and analysis of errors made in the acquisition of Romanian by native-speakers of French,[3] Gheorghe Doca examines the data from the following three standpoints: errors made according 1) to an inflectional category (e.g., case, gender, etc., p. 67), 2) the part of speech involved (pp. 63-64), and 3) a given syntactic pattern (e.g., word order, repetition of direct and indirect noun objects by pronouns, pp. 68-69). Leaving the last-named aside, in order to concentrate on questions of discrete forms, the data may be ranked in order of frequency of error as follows:

rank	inflectional category	percentage
1	the definite article (enclitic in Romanian)	22.9
2	number	21.0
3	person	16.9
4	case	10.8
5	gender	10.0
6	tense	7.8
7	mood	6.1
8	voice	3.5
9	comparison	.7
		99.7%

	part of speech	
1	noun	28.2
2	verb	28.1
3	adjective	11.9
4	article	10.9
5	pronoun	6.9
6	preposition	6.1
7	adverb	4.6
8	conjunction	2.3
9	numeral	.7
		99.7%

Doca's hypothesis, that native-speakers of French will encounter psycholinguistic interferences--which in the course of acquiring Romanian must be prevented or else eliminated--is further developed (pp. 151-165) along the lines of the concept of regularization. A process parallel to that presumed to be found in the child, regularization is for the adult

language student the replacement--via "autoformulation" of a rule--of irregular by regular forms (p. 151).[4]

In the instance of Romanian, Doca discerns four areas of structure which offer special problems to French speakers (pp. 152-153): 1) the noun plural, 2) agreement of the adjective with the noun, 3) the conjugation of the present tense of the verb, and 4) the formation of the 3rd person present subjunctive. Since a given part of speech in Romanian is susceptible of classification into numerous sub-categories,[5] the student is faced with the problem of choosing the appropriate model to follow.

For example, the testing materials utilized (p. 214) were an ingeniously devised mix of forms known to the subjects, of forms invented for the occasion, and of Romanian forms whose surface structure resembled the first-named. Hence, the object in the following sequence was the determination by the test subject of the correct plurals: cadou-*lipou-erou, yielding correct neuter cadouri and masculine eroi, and presumably *lipouri. Another example had as its object distinguishing between first conjugation verbs with and without infix {ez}, as lucra-*lidora-certa, yielding lucrez, cert, and probably *lidorez.[6]

As a teacher of Romanian, and an observer of others so engaged, I have been long interested in materials prepared for its study. As is to be expected in the case of languages of limited circulation--in particular those designated as "less commonly taught" or as being in the American national interest--availability of appropriate materials is perhaps always destined to remain problematic. Still, possibly contrary to common belief, texts and ancillary materials for the Romanian language cannot be considered exactly wanting, in number and in quality, either in the West or--these

days especially--in Romania where ever greater numbers of foreign students have been going to take advantage of its educational facilities.[7]

In an effort to update materials published principally outside Romania --but including Romanian works widely circulated in the West--I have examined recently some fifty texts, which may be broadly described as fitting the following categories: Teaching Materials, Pedagogical Grammars, Grammars, and Readers.[8] The distinction between the first two is one of degree and emphasis, a Pedagogical Grammar being something more than a reference work--whose purpose is as much affirming as it is informing--but which lacks some element (e.g., exercises) considered essential for language-teaching. Typically, Teaching Materials are "courses", covering both speech and reading skills. Only exceptionally do the works examined go beyond what is judged appropriate for beginners.[9]

With this in mind, I have chosen for the purposes of this paper four such works, to determine to what degree the classifications (inflectional categories and parts of speech) used by Doca can be applied to them. The works are recent, having appeared in the past decade and a half (from Cazacu et al. in 1969 to the newest work, that of Deletant in 1983); their sources are varied (the United States, Great Britain, Romania). Boţoman et al. is a Reader, the others Teaching Materials. All are designed for the native-speaker of English.[10]

Excepting Cazacu et al., two "texts" were selected from each work, giving seven in all. They are mostly dialogs or conversations between two or more persons, with the exception of descriptive accounts in Boţoman et al.[11]

With the corpus thus established, each lexical unit was compared--with the object of assuring as homogeneous a lexicon as possible--against a checklist of 1607 high frequency items compiled from a variety of studies.[12] Unlike the Doca work, my purpose was neither error analysis nor confirmation of the concept of regularization. It was rather to avail myself of the rubrics of inflectional categories and of parts of speech--especially as they intersect (e.g., the enclitic article in nouns and adjectives, person in verbs and pronouns, and so on)--in order to determine to what degree Romanian language-teaching materials deal initially with the complexities of Romanian forms.[13]

In terms of their pertinence for the parts of speech (the adjective, article, noun, numeral, pronoun and verb), the inflectional categories may be plotted as follows:

rank	inflectional category	inflectional label	parts of speech
1	number	singular, plural	adjective article noun numeral[14] pronoun verb
2	gender	masculine, feminine, neuter[15]	adjective article noun numeral[16] pronoun (verb)[17]
3	case[18]	nominative, accusative, genitive, dative, vocative	adjective article noun pronoun (verb)[19]
4	definitization	definite article, no definite article[20]	adjective noun

rank	inflectional category	inflectional label	parts of speech
5	deicticization	deictic particle, no deictic particle[21]	adjective pronoun[22]
6	person	first, second, third[23]	pronoun verb
7	mood	indicative, subjunctive, imperative[24]	verb
8	tense[25]	present, imperfect	verb

My findings, with total numbers of occurrences for each inflectional category and label indicated to the right, are as follows:

1	number	singular	493
		plural	134
2	gender	masculine	119
		feminine[26]	199
		neuter	116
3	case	nominative	180
		accusative	212
		genitive	20
		dative	18
		vocative	5
4	definitization	definite article	69
		no definite article	156
5	deicticization	deictic particle	4
		no deictic particle	15
6	person	first	83
		second	28
		third	160
7	mood	indicative	156
		subjunctive	17
		imperative	4
8	tense	present	152
		imperfect	8

First of all, it must be conceded that the results shown here are no doubt in part at least a function of the corpus chosen, relatively small as it was and destined for the beginner. Still, such conservative findings

tell us something not only about the nature of the texts used but very likely about the overall patternings of the Romanian language, namely a preponderance of forms which for the sake of convenience may be called "primary". Hence, in addition to the concept of regularization developed in Doca as part of the language-learning process, I would suggest in the case of such highly inflected languages as Romanian that we must take into account the pronounced inclination towards what I shall call normalization, i.e., a preference for given base forms and primary categories. Accordingly, from what has been thus far shown, the use of the singular is vastly preferred to that of the plural; the nominative and accusative considerably outweigh all other cases; most substantives do not carry the definite article, and the deictic particle is rare. The indicative mood and the present tense are also preferred classes, as is the 3rd person. One unusual finding is the predominance of feminines vis-à-vis both the masculine and the neuter. Work remaining to be done would be the statistical determination of what is taking place in our corpus in the internal morphophonemic alternations, mentioned above.

As I have had opportunity to observe over the years non-native speakers of Romanian--often they were American researchers on Fulbright-Hays and IREX awards--I have been struck by the impression that a remarkably high level of "communication" has taken place on the part of such scholars whose approach to the language has been essentially syntactic, i.e., stringing together whole series of lexical base forms, with little regard for such refinements as endings for number or gender or person, and with even less for the internal alternations. Still, I think we all agree it goes without saying that an understanding and even a certain mastery of Romanian morphology are essential for those who wish to come to grips

with the language on its own terms. (It would be of interest to test on native-speakers of Romanian--who, like many speakers of languages of relatively little currency, are terribly forgiving of those courageous enough to try using their language--the various degrees of acceptability of errors, ranging from total lack of comprehension to mild annoyance at deviations from the standard.)

It further seems to me that authors of manuals and other teaching materials must take into account the norms and variants, even down to the statistical level, of forms and structures as they are used by native-speakers. Anything less is a deception and a distorted view of the true state of the language, and is a sort of spoon feeding which can in the long run only be a disservice to the learner. By one definition, a grammar is something which accounts for all of the irregularities of a language. In devising materials for Romanian, we must, I suggest, keep a balance between the statistical preponderance of primary forms and categories on the one hand and the potentially great plethora of surface forms on the other.

Statistics on real usage at the phonological level are to be found in Roceric-Alexandrescu.[27] Of even greater importance for my purposes are the figures given in the word-frequency study cited above by Juilland et al. on the frequency of given forms within a paradigm. Work I am currently engaged in is concerned precisely with such questions of usage, dealing as I am with forms ranging from those which have only a theoretical existence in Romanian to those employed by native-speakers in actual practice. The work envisaged is ultimately a dictionary of Romanian forms; beyond that, it is a word grammar which is to include an analysis and quantification of features such as accent, syllable structure, derivations

(in the synchronic sense), and homographs, along with such features already noted (definitization, the use of the deictic particle, case, etc.), the items being viewed within the context of a lemmatized list in which a main entry dominates a complex of features.

In short, the work is conceived of as a self-contained word-list, all of whose features are given in terms of the original corpus of the 1600-odd high frequency items already referred to. The intention is to present a statistical overview of Romanian structure, consisting of explicit tabulations of the features enumerated in the dictionary, thus providing convenience of access to information which itself shall shed light on the dynamics of Romanian usage. Ultimately such findings would be put to use in establishing a hierarchy of difficulties to be confronted by the learner.

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Notes

1 Cf. my review-article of Elizabeth Close, The Development of Modern Rumanian. Linguistic Theory and Practice in Muntenia 1821-1838 (London, 1974), in General Linguistics 17:4 (1977), 247-254.

2 {a}[2], commonly held to derive from Latin hac, is more plausibly to be taken as a reflex of illac. Hence, cartea aceasta would be literally 'book-the' plus 'this-there'. Cf. French là, -là.

3 Gheorghe Doca, Analyse psycholinguistique des erreurs faites lors de l'apprentissage d'une langue étrangère. Applications au domaine franco-roumain (Bucharest/Paris, 1981), 250 pp., reviewed by Suzette Haden Elgin in Language 59:2 (1983), 427-429. For a recent examination of problems involving the personal pronoun, also on the part of French speakers, cf. Maria Steriu, "Dificultăți întîmpinate de francofoni în însușirea pronumelui personal obiect direct/indirect din limba română", Victoria Moldovan et al., eds., Logos și methodos (Cluj-Napoca, 1982), pp. 172-179.

4 The term "autoformulation" is to be credited to Tatiana Slama-Cazacu, cf. Doca, p. 151.

5 For one such example of noun classification, cf. Maria Iliescu et al., Vocabularul minimal al limbii române pentru studenți străini (Bucharest, 1981), which lists--by taking into account the vowel alternations--no fewer than 34 sub-types of the Romanian feminine noun (e.g., Fi casă, Fia ceafă, Fib fată, and so on), pp. 116-118.

6 Numerous examples of erroneous forms are cited in Doca, e.g., nouns *lumă for lume, *oui for ouăle, verbs *ducească for ducă, *preferez for prefer, and so on, pp. 83-84. Cf. my "Language-Teaching: the Romanian Way", Miorița: a Journal of Romanian Studies 7:1 (1980, especially pp. 33-37, based on observation of the University of Bucharest summer seminars at Brasov, Romania, 1974.

7 Examination of the second most recent of the annual linguistics bibliographies by Ion Dănăilă and Eleonora Popa in Limba română 31:4-5 (1982), in particular the section entitled Manuale, cursuri, ghiduri, pp. 423-430, reveals over two dozen such works, appearing in the years 1979 through 1981 in virtually every educational center of Romania--not just Bucharest and Cluj-Napoca, but Bacau, Craiova, Jassy, Pitesti, Timisoara as well--with every conceivable orientation, agronomy and medicine predominating, but including chemistry, economics, pedagogy, the social sciences, and the technical sciences.

8 The classifications are borrowed from earlier surveys, Dora E. Johnson, Birgit A. Blass, Stephen R. Cahir, William W. Gage, William F. Hanks, Elizabeth Kimmell, and Dorothy Rapp, A Survey of Materials for the Study of the Uncommonly Taught Languages, vol. 2, Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union (Arlington, 1976), pp. 1-3, and Birgit A. Blass, Dora E. Johnson, and William W. Gage, A Provisional Survey of Materials for the Study of Neglected Languages (Washington, D.C., 1969), pp. 51-52. The first-named also has a 1982 Supplement.

9 The question of Romanian-language materials suitable beyond the first year is dealt with in James E. Augerot, ed., The Development of Romanian Grammar Pamphlets (Arlington, Virginia, 1973), an examination of ten problem areas, with exercises (e.g., F. B. Agard, "I. Some Romanian Determiners", J. E. Augerot, "III. The Conjugation of the Romanian Verb", etc.).

10 The textbooks are: James E. Augerot and Florin D. Popescu, Modern Romanian. Limba română (Seattle/London, 1971, xiii+329 pp.); Rodica Boţoman, Donald E. Corbin, and E. Garrison Walters, Îmi place limba română. A Romanian Reader (Columbus, 1981, iii+199, plus nine unnumbered pp.); Boris Cazacu, Clara Georgeta Chiosa, Matilda Caragiu Marioţeanu, and Valeria Guţu Romalo (A. Nicolescu and V. Ştefănescu-Drăgăneşti, transl.), A Course in Contemporary Romanian: an Introduction to the Study of Romanian (Bucharest, 1969, 564 pp.); and Dennis Deletant, Colloquial Romanian (London, 1983, viii+335 pp.).

11 "Texts" were taken typically from both early and late portions of the sources; their length varies widely: Augerot and Popescu, from lessons 1 and 17 (of a total of 32), consisting respectively of 7 lines, 39 lexical units (less 3 not on the lists made up from sources given in note 12) and 19 lines, 239 lexical units (less 28); Boţoman et al., lessons 1 and 15 (of 15), respectively 45 lines, 237 units (less 68) and 104 lines, 558 units (less 119); Cazacu et al., lesson 1 (of 30), 16 lines, 86 units (less 14); and Deletant, lessons 6 and 24 (of 25), respectively 12 lines, 102 units (less 22) and 15 lines, 136 units (less 26).

12 The word-frequency studies are: G. Bolocan, "Unele caracteristici ale stilului publicistic a limbii romîne literare", Studii şi cercetări lingvistice 12:1 (1961), 35-71; A. Graur, Încercare asupra fondului principal lexical al limbii romîne (Bucharest, 1954); Edith Iarovici and Rodica Mihăilă-Cova et al., Lexicul de bază al limbii engleze. Dicţionar contrastiv (Bucharest, 1979), pp. 612-622; Maria Iliescu, Grundwortschatz Rumänisch-Deutsch-Englisch-Französisch (Frankfurt/M., 1979); Maria Iliescu et al., Vocabularul minimal al limbii române pentru studenţi străini (Bucharest, 1981); Alphonse Juilland et al., Frequency Dictionary of Rumanian Words (The Hague, 1965); Viorel Păltineanu, Dicţionar practic pentru studenţii străini (Cluj-Napoca, 1980); and V. Şuteu, "Observaţii asupra frecvenţei cuvintelor în operele unor scriitori romîni", Studii şi cercetări lingvistice 10:3 (1959), 419-443. In terms of individual lexical items, the present study consists of 278 words; cf. Basic English, 850, and français élémentaire, 1374.

13 Morphological complexity in Romanian need not, however, entail something similar at the phonetic level: compare the two-syllable structure of the feminine singular nominative-accusative carte with its triply marked plural cărţi which is monosyllabic.

14 While the cardinal numerals are not formally marked for number, they show singular-plural agreement with substantives and concord with verbs.

15 Though Romanian neuter singular nouns behave like masculines, and the plurals like feminines, I prefer the term "neuter" to "ambigene".

16 Gender in the numeral is formally marked only in un, unu: o, una '1', doi: două '2', and doisprezece: douăsprezece '12'.

17 Gender in the verb is restricted to the past participle, as in passive constructions such as Casa a fost distrusă 'The house was destroyed'.

18 The nominative case form is the same in Romanian as the accusative in adjectives and nouns, just as the genitive is the same as the dative; I have distinguished between them, using syntactical criteria owing to the formal case differences in the personal pronoun system.

19 In the example given in note 17, distrusă is formally and syntactically in the nominative case. Compare Stă în faţa casei distrusă de incendiu 'He/she is standing in front of the house destroyed by (the) fire'; here, distrusă is formally a nominative; syntactically, however, it is a genitive "agreeing' with casei.

20 Certain pronouns have a definite article as part of their form (e.g., altul, primul, unul) and are therefore not considered here.

21 The principal use of the deictic particle is in marking postposed demonstrative adjectives (cf. această carte and cartea aceasta, cited earlier). Its occurrence in demonstrative pronouns is a matter of word formation and is not considered here. Its appearance in other pronouns is a function of case; compare, for example, non-deicticized nominative-accusatives altul, alta and genitive-dative altuia, alteia, also amîndoi and amîndurora, and toţi, toate and tuturora. Masculine-neuter singular adjective or pronoun atît is in free variation with atîta.

22 The deictic particle is commonly found in such demonstrative adverbs as acum(a) 'now', aici (aicea) 'here', atunci (atuncea) 'then', especially in the spoken language. The difference is not functional, but a question of emphasis.

23 By definition, all nouns and non-personal pronouns are in the 3rd person. This is true as well for possessive adjectives and pronouns which may have a real-world reference to 1st and 2nd persons, e.g., meu, al meu, tău, al tău, etc. These instances are not taken into account statistically here.

24 In the simple tenses, the subjunctive is restricted to the present tense.

25 In addition to the two simple tenses analytical constructions appear in the corpus as follows: perfectul compus, 18 occurrences; the o să future, 5; the voi future, 3. There is one instance of a presumptive (o fi plus gerund).

26 There are five additional instances of masculine and feminine together.

27 Alexandra Roceric-Alexandrescu, Fono-statistica limbii române (Bucharest, 1968), 173 pp.